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SUBJECT: NOVEMBER 28-29 VISIT OF IRAQI FM ZEBARI

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary and comment: MFA contacts described the November 28-29 visit of Iraqi FM Zebari as a success, but did not suggest that the visit will herald an increase in modest French assistance levels to Iraq. FM Douste-Blazy reportedly stressed to Zebari GoF support for an inclusive political process and Arab League-initiated Iraqi reconciliation efforts. The French FM also called for more regular interaction with the GOI and stressed GoF readiness to help with reconstruction, largely in the context of existing GoF exchange programs and the EU JUSTLEX program. The two sides addressed the long-stalled French offer to train Iraqi police in France, for which MFA officials said the GoF is still awaiting an Iraqi response, while Zebari suggested publicly that the GoF was responsible for the delay. MFA officials were struck by the depth of Zebari's negativity on Syria, in contrast to his more positive remarks on Iran. While FM Douste-Blazy did not question Zebari's assessment of the malicious Syrian role in Iraq, he stressed to the Iraqi FM that France would not use UNSCR 1559 as a weapon against Syria. MFA officials praised Zebari's effectiveness as an interlocutor, which they contrasted with perceived incompetence of other ITG ministers. End summary and comment.

12. (C) Iraqi FM Hoshiyar Zebari visited Paris November 28-29, at GoF invitation, and met with FM Douste-Blazy, French Senate President Christian Poncelet, and members of the French Senate and National Assembly. MFA DAS-equivalent Antoine Sivan briefed us November 30 on the visit, describing it as a success and long-overdue. Sivan stressed the significant timing of Zebari's visit, coming just two weeks before Iraqi elections and on the heels of the successful Arab League-sponsored reconciliation meeting in Cairo. He expressed hope that the Zebari visit would help France establish better relations with Iraq's permanent government, and herald more regular high-level Iraqi visits to France.

#### POLITICAL PROCESS

13. (C) On the November 28 meeting between Zebari and Douste-Blazy, Sivan reported that the French FM's main message was one of support for Iraq's political process, and a desire for more regular, high-level interaction between France and Iraq. The French FM commended the October 15 referendum, especially the high voter turnout, as well as the Arab League initiative on Iraqi reconciliation, which he hoped would help result in a new parliament "more representative" of Iraq's population. Zebari, for his part, briefed Douste-Blazy on the evolution in Iraq's political process since 2004 and the crucial run-up to December elections. According to Sivan, the Iraqi FM emphasized that Iraq's next government would be one of "national unity," which would be more stable than its predecessors and maintain the unity of the country. Sivan said Zebari sought to emphasize his support for Iraq's unity and greater Sunni inclusion in the political process, important points of agreement with the GoF. Sivan reported that Zebari also thanked the GoF for its support for Arab League efforts to promote Iraqi reconciliation, which he described as a joint Iraqi-Arab League initiative.

#### FOCUS ON EXISTING ASSISTANCE, TRAINING OFFERS, ASSETS, DEBT

14. (C) According to Sivan, Douste-Blazy also stressed to Zebari the GoF's readiness to assist Iraq's reconstruction within the context of existing programs, such as the EU "JUSTLEX" program (under which 40 Iraqi police have attended gendarme courses in France), as well as cultural exchanges (through which some 500 Iraqi students have studied in France, usually for two to six months). Asked about prospects for increased or new GoF assistance to Iraq, Sivan claimed that Zebari did not press the issue, though the Iraqi FM did stress the need to speed up the JUSTLEX program.

15. (C) Sivan confirmed that the two sides had discussed the long-stalled GoF offer to train up to 1,500 Iraqi police in France, though there were no breakthroughs. Sivan stressed that the training offer remained on the table, and that Zebari's visit hopefully would prompt movement on the Iraqi side. At the same time, Sivan conceded that prior to the

Zebari visit, the GoF had rebuffed a proposed visit from an Iraqi Vice Minister for Security to discuss the offer, based on doubts about the official's competence and GoF inability to secure ministerial level meetings. Sivan concluded that the GoF wanted participant names from the GOI, not another MOI delegation visit, to finalize the training. Poloff questioned Sivan's dismissive attitude to the MOI follow-up visit, and stressed the need to be responsive to Iraqi training needs and work constructively with the ITG to implement the offer. In press remarks, FM Zebari stressed Iraqi readiness to accept the French training offer, and suggested that the delay was on the French side, noting that the ITG had sent senior officials and diplomatic notes to discuss the training and in what country it might take place. Asked about Zebari's suggestion that the French training could take place somewhere other than France, Sivan emphasized that the GoF training offer was intended to take place in France only. (Comment: When France first floated the training proposal in 2003, it left open the possibility that training might take place somewhere in the region, outside Iraq; this past year, GoF officials have increasingly suggested that the training would be possible in France only in the near term, with prospects for training in the region, such as Qatar, much further down the road. End comment.)

16. (C) Sivan reported that Zebari and Douste-Blazy also discussed Iraqi assets frozen by France, for which transfer to the Development Fund to Iraq (DFI) requires new French legislation. Sivan explained that the French Ministry of Finance was on the verge of finalizing the draft legislation for submission to the National Assembly, and conceded that the progress had been slowed by interagency coordination. Sivan added that the GoF had hoped to sign the bilateral accord formalizing cancellation of Iraq's debt during Zebari's visit, but was unable to do so. According to Sivan, the agreement was "not quite ready" to be signed at the time of Zebari's visit, but it would be finalized shortly, with signature taking place within a few days.

#### HARSH CRITICISM OF SYRIA, BUT NOT IRAN

17. (C) Sivan was struck by the vehemence of Zebari's criticism of Syria, which the Iraqi FM described as Iraq's number one problem and the main source of terrorist infiltration. Zebari stressed to Douste-Blazy that the SARG harbored malicious intent towards Iraq and that it was not a case of lack of Syrian capacity in securing its border. Sivan reported that Zebari made an interesting comparison between Syria and Iran, and posited that the SARG, based on its hard-core Ba'thist character, was seeking to demolish the political process in Iraq; Iran, by contrast, supported Iraq's political process to the extent that it sought to promote its political proxies within Iraq. In the end, Zebari concluded that Iran wanted a stable Iraq, albeit one susceptible to its influence, while Syria did not. Asked how Douste-Blazy responded to Zebari on Syria, Sivan affirmed that the French FM did not disagree with Zebari's assertions. At the same time, the French FM stressed to Zebari that the GoF remained insistent on Syrian compliance with UNSCR 1559, "nothing more" than that, and that it would not use UNSCR 1559 as a weapon against Syria.

#### PRAISE FOR ZEBARI, CRITICISM OF HIS COLLEAGUES

18. (C) Sivan concluded by praising Zebari's effectiveness and shrewdness as an interlocutor, which he viewed as an exception among ITG ministers. He observed that Zebari's presentation to the National Assembly foreign relations committee impressed the audience of some 40 MP's, who, while perhaps not totally convinced of his arguments, deferred to his views on prospects for the political process and the need for U.S. troop reductions to be conditions-based. Sivan asserted that, in contrast, other ITG ministers who had visited France in the past year, including the Ministers of Culture and Education, had done a "disservice" to Iraq by the ineptitude with which they handled meetings with the GoF. He ascribed the situation to an overwhelming lack of capacity within the ITG, where he asserted, with the exception of Zebari, most ministries operated as personal fiefdoms of incompetent ministers. Sivan expressed hope that formation of Iraq's permanent government would herald a more competent administrative corps, to which poloff stressed the need for France to offer more help, on the ground, in building Iraqi capacity.

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